U.S. SHOULD FOLLOW SOVIET WEAPONS SYSTEM
BY JACK ANDERSON AND DALE VAN ATTA

WASHINGTON -- Good old American know-how and free enterprise are what made the United States the arsenal of democracy, and will assure that we triumph over the hopelessly inefficient Soviet system of military research and development.

American industrial management needs no lessons from a bunch of commie bureaucrats. Right?

Wrong, declares a CIA specialist in a study intended for official eyes only. The U.S. weapons-procurement system, the study reports, is ''in deep trouble.'' It takes too long, costs too much and ''taxes away too much of the time and energies of the limited (personnel).''

The study's heretical conclusions, which may induce cardiac seizures among the procurement poohbahs, are that U.S. policy-makers would be well advised to borrow a few leaves from the Soviet book on weapons development.

In fact, the report congratulates the Reagan administration for adopting some Soviet ideas already. A copy has been obtained by our associate Indy Badhwar.

''One of the most concerted efforts ever attempted to repair the ailing U.S. system ... focused on 32 separate initiatives,'' the CIA report states, adding: ''A number of (these) proposed actions coincided with Soviet practice. One official who was involved in formulating the initiatives confirmed that some were drafted with Soviet practices in mind.''

But the author of the study, operating with an in-house CIA grant under an ''exceptional intelligence analyst program,'' added this warning: ''Without structural changes to the U.S. system, these or any actions are said to be difficult to implement.''

The study, embarrassing as it may be to the entrenched Pentagon weapons-development establishment, confirms the general criticism we've been offering for years: The system that worked such miracles in World War II has degenerated into a costly and complicated process that makes multibillion-dollar boondoggles inevitable. Only a top-to-bottom shakeup can restore efficiency

and cost-effectiveness to the Pentagon's cumbersome weapons programs, which eat up a staggering portion of the federal budget each year.

Indeed, the CIA analyst's most telling criticism may be in the anecdote he relates about an expert on arms production who was asked how the U.S. effort in World War II succeeded so splendidly ''with so few people (doing) so much with so little.'' The expert replied: ''Because there were so few people.''

Among the myriad deficiencies in the U.S. system today, the report says, is the growing length of time it takes to acquire new weapons. For example, the first submerged ballistic missile, the Polaris A-1, was developed in less than five years; the A-5 took more than six years, the Poseidon C-3 took nine years and the Trident C-4 11 years.

''The increasing lead time,'' the CIA analyst notes, ''results in greater costs and, in a fast-changing technological arms competition, tends to render systems almost obsolete by the time they are operational.''

The report points out that the Pentagon's cost overruns are far greater than those of other countries. Citing figures that show cost overruns in France, Sweden and Great Britain are between 10 percent and 30 percent, the report states that U.S. cost overruns range between 50 percent and 80 percent.

Among the specific flaws the report finds in the U.S. system are the continuous interference of Congress throughout the development of a weapon; the use of cost-plus contracts; testing procedures designed not so much to evaluate weapons as to help decide whether to allocate more money for succeeding stages of development; cutthroat competition that leads to unrealistically low bids, and the incredibly complex bidding system.

Five competitors for one Air Force plane contract, for example, submitted documents that weighed a total of 35 tons, the report states.